'I just happened to be in the

by Bob Dalton

"I just happened to be in the right place at the right time," is Walter L. Huber's modest assessment of his tenure as administrator of Tacoma General Hospital.

To others Huber is farsighted and provided much of the leadership that has made Tacoma a quality health care center. Dr. J. G. Katterhagen, director of the hospital's oncology department, is quick to speak of Huber's farsightedness.

"He is very refreshing. Two years ago I was rattling my chains trying to get a hospital in the community to provide total cancer care—diagnosis and treatment, not only for Tacoma, but Southwest Washington. Walter Huber was interested, extremely knowledgeable on the subject, and was aware of the necessity of some institution establishing this complete care for the citizens.

"He saw the necessity of creating and supporting a radiation therapy department, an oncology department, a tumor board, increased medical education in cancer care and increased staff education in cancer care—all as part of Tacoma General's cancer center," Dr. Katterhagen stated.

Hospital staff members have cited other examples of this farsightedness as:

—Concern for hospital safety years before mandatory requirements,

—establishment of the cancer registry,

—establishment of a day care center for hospital employees' children several years before others were pointing out the need for such facilities,

—establishment of a diabetic school for both outpatients and inpatients,

—establishment of a visiting nurse program,

—installation of pollution control devices before ecology and environment became the "in thing."

"Education has been a must with Mr. Huber," stated Mrs. Bess M. Piggott, director of Tacoma General Hospital's School of Nursing. In addition to the school of nursing, the hospital has a school of medical technology, school of radiology, medical residency programs in

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His philosophy toward hospital management is reflected in statements frequently made to employees: "Whatever you are doing, whatever decision you make, remember the patient must always come first." The yardstick for a new piece of equipment, more building or a new procedure has been: "How will it help the patients?"

This philosophy was evident in his willingness to acquire and spend money for the best in health care for the patients while maintaining a balanced budget. To Huber, helping the patients is accomplished in part by meeting the needs of the employees, medical staff, and com-

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pathology and anesthesiology, internships in dietary and chaplaincy, and medical education programs for staff members. He has encouraged education for personal growth and advancement, as well as in-service education.

The soft-spoken Huber utilizes a calm approach to leadership as described by one hospital employee:

"When you walk into his office, whether it is to talk about your area of responsiblity, to discuss a problem or an emergency situation, his quiet calm gives you the feeling of security. His answers will not be 'spur of the moment' but carefully and logically made. You leave knowing everything will be all right.

"He offers guidance, yet allows you to attempt new policies and procedures. He encourages independent thinking and action when based upon sound principles. If you fail, you are not reluctant to admit it, for he never makes you feel a failure. Your ego is repaired by him and you are given the courage to try again. He is quick to compliment, and very slow to citicize; then, only when absolutely necessary, to help the individual or group to become productive again.

"With all of his responsibility for all of us—our complaints, our problems, our demands of him—his sense of humor is always there. It is delightful and helps to put things in the proper perspective. He is an extraordinary man. We who work with him are privileged."

Walter L. Huber

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munity.

On Aug. 5, Huber will retire after 24 years with Tacoma General. He joined the hospital in 1950 as business manager and controller. In 1955 he was named assistant administrator. Four years later he became administrator. In addition to his duties as administrator he has served as executive vice president and this spring was elected president of the board of directors.

His leadership in the health care fied was not limited to Tacoma. Huber is past president of Washington State Nurse Planning Council, Washington State Hospital Association, Washington Chapter of Hospital Financial Management Association and Pierce County Hospital Council. He has served as a member of the Review Committee of the Puget Sound Health Planning Council and as a trustee of the Washington State Hospital Association Insurance and Retirement Trust. Huber devoted 12 years as a member of the board of directors of Blue Cross, Washington-Alaska Inc., serving two years as vice president, two years as corporate secretary and seven years as a member of the executive committee.